

# Aztec Ruins

National Monument

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## General Management Planning News



Issue 2

January 2004

## Message from the Superintendent

Dear Friend of Aztec Ruins,

The National Park Service has begun work on a new long range management plan for Aztec Ruins National Monument. The existing Aztec Ruins General Management Plan (GMP) was completed in 1989. Over the next 15 to 20 years, a new GMP will guide long-term goals and objectives for resource management; visitor understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment; facility development; and identify ways to accomplish goals by working in partnership with park neighbors, the City of Aztec, American Indian tribes, and other stakeholders.

The purpose of this newsletter is to:

- share information about the GMP process, preliminary results of the visitor survey, and public comments;
- present foundation statements; and
- obtain your thoughts and views on what Aztec Ruins National Monument should be like in the future.

Aztec Ruins contains some of the most remarkably well-preserved ancestral Pueblo architecture in the Southwest. These special resources are managed by the National Park Service, and are recognized internationally as a designated World Heritage Site. The National Park Service conserves unimpaired the cultural

and natural resources of this site for present and future generations.

Public participation is an essential aspect of our planning process. Your input will help us evaluate the park's current conditions and anticipated future needs, while considering conservation of park resources, and visitor use. Please take some time to help us plan for the future by completing and returning the enclosed Response Form. Your thoughts on how we can provide the highest quality service to the visiting public, while conserving the park's heritage and resources for ourselves and our descendants, will be important considerations as we start to develop alternatives for management.

Thank you for your continuing participation in planning for the future of Aztec Ruins National Monument.

Sincerely,

Dennis L. Carruth  
Superintendent,  
Aztec Ruins National Monument

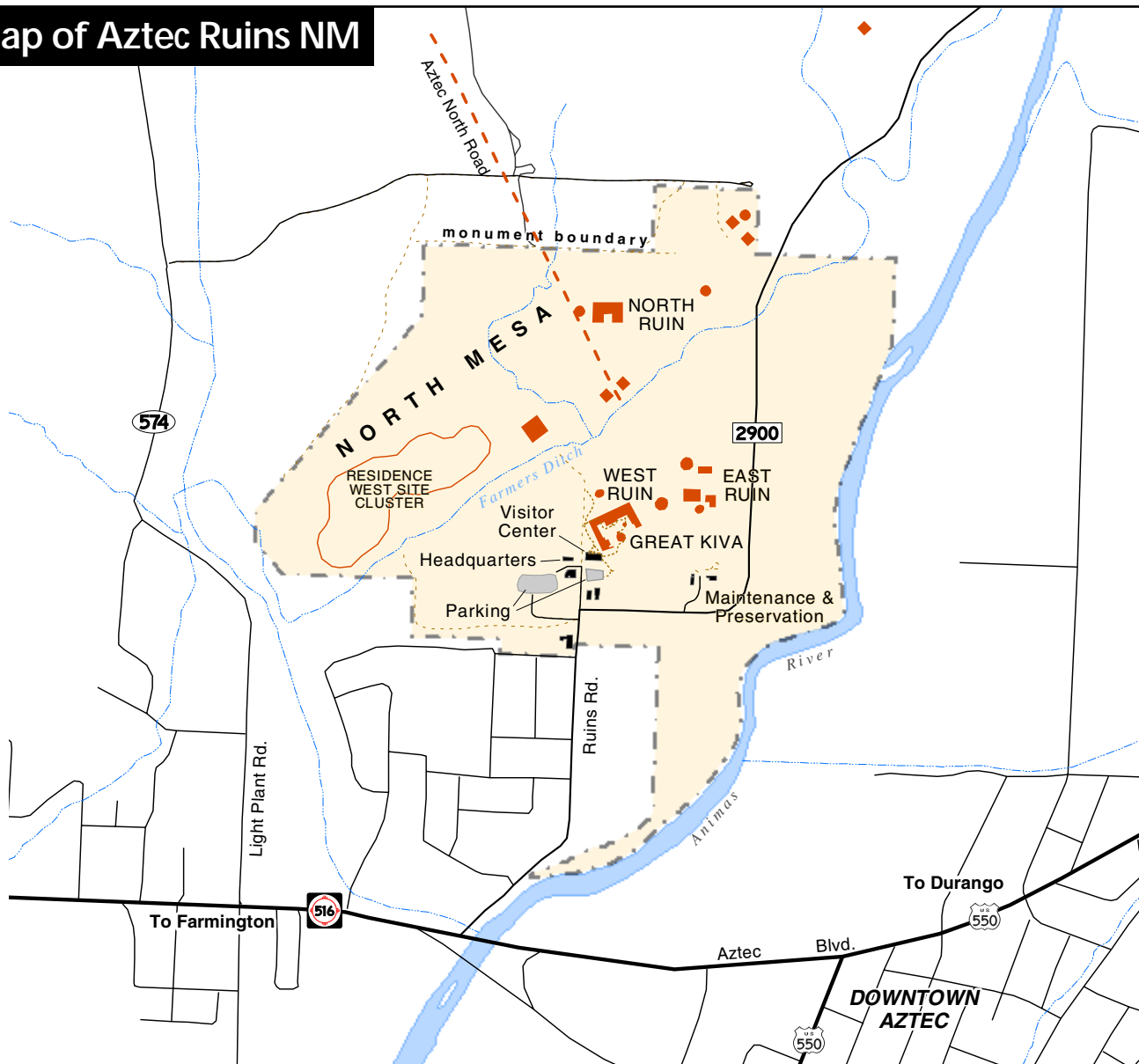


### National Park Service Mission Statement

*The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.*



## Map of Aztec Ruins NM



## What is a General Management Plan?

A General Management Plan is a tool that establishes the basic management philosophy of the park and provides the rationale for making management decisions that affect the park's resources and visitor experience. Its purpose is to:

- Clearly describe specific desired resource conditions and visitor experiences in various management units throughout the park; and
- Identify the kinds of management, use, and development that will be appropriate to achieving and maintaining those conditions.

The GMP and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement present and analyze distinctly different alternatives that address the park's present and future needs, such as future development, stewardship of

its cultural and natural resources, and its educational and interpretive programs. Ultimately, the GMP helps management establish priorities for funding and allocation of staff.

Some fundamental questions a GMP needs to answer are:

- How can we best manage the park to protect and preserve it for present and future generations, while providing for visitor use, appreciation, and understanding?
- What facilities are needed to provide for park operations, visitor use, interpretation, cultural and natural resource management, and partnerships?

## The Planning Process

There are seven phases of the planning process:

- Foundation Statements
- Information Gathering

### ➡ Data Collection and Analysis

- Alternatives Development
- Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS)
- Final GMP/EIS
- Record of Decision

We are completing the data collection and analysis phase and will begin development of alternatives for management over the Spring and Summer of 2004. One purpose of this newsletter is to share with you the scoping comments we heard during the public information meetings and so far in the visitor survey.

We hope that you will take a few moments to complete the enclosed Response Form. You may mail it or fax it to us; or send us your comments via e-mail or the park web site. And if you have questions, please feel free to call the superintendent.

**Dennis L. Carruth**  
Aztec Ruins National Monument  
#84 County Road 2900  
Aztec Ruins, NM 87410-9715  
Tel: (505) 334-6174 x. 22  
Fax: (505) 334-6372  
E-mail: [azru\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:azru_superintendent@nps.gov)

Another way we will be sharing information is through our mailing list. If you are not yet on the mailing list, but would like to be, please so indicate on the Response Form.

The next round of public meetings will be hosted when the Draft GMP/EIS is released for public comment. Please look for press releases, advertising dates, times, and locations, or check out our website at [www.nps.gov/azru](http://www.nps.gov/azru) and select "General Management Plan". Throughout the planning process, project updates will also be available on the website.

**Please send your comments to us within two weeks of receipt of this newsletter.**

## Summary of Public and Tribal Information Comments

A series of public and tribal information meetings was conducted in October 2003 at various locations in New Mexico. Public information meetings were hosted on October 16 in the City Council Chambers in Aztec and at an open house at the park on October 18. Meetings with tribal representatives and other members of the public occurred on October 27 in Santa Fe, October 28 in Albuquerque, and October 29 in Gallup. A reoccurring topic in all meetings was interpretation.

During the meeting in Aztec, comments encouraged the expansion of the interpretive emphasis from the West Ruin to incorporate other areas of the park. Commentors were excited about the range of interpretive opportunities inside the park ranging from the application of new research to

the development of new trails. Outside the park, the interpretive program could reach out into the community to promote an awareness of how the park is connected to the San Juan and Rio Grande Valleys. The importance of living community was discussed in numerous ways. Some suggested that how the land changes over time is an important story to share. Others suggested that sharing of more artifacts and oral traditions can help bridge time between original occupants and today's visitors. Commentors also spoke to the importance of a good working relationship among the park, the City of Aztec, and the tribes. Partnering to improve signs and roads is just as important as partnering to enhance interpretation provided at the park and other related sites.



During the open house at the park visitor center, a range of comments on interpretation was recorded. Commentors were interested in having more interactive opportunities, from watching stabilization activities to expanding work with educators. The topic of working more collaboratively with neighbors to protect the park resources also generated enthusiasm.

In Santa Fe, interpretation was the primary topic of conversation. From expansion of the trail system to the North Mesa area, to three-dimensional models, people were excited about opportunities to expand interpretative program offerings. Some encouraged the park to identify cultural resources, partners, and activities that could support the development of a “Heritage” concept that could be interwoven with park programs.

In Albuquerque, many comments spoke to the possibilities associated with a developing relationship between the park and interested tribes. Some believe that the park should host cultural events and invite tribes to demonstrate things like dances, food preparation, and arts. Some also suggested that the park should seek to provide ways for American Indians to visit the park, such as providing bus transportation. Sharing information with others was also discussed in detail. Some commented that sites ranging from the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, the University of New Mexico, and local chambers of commerce should be approached by the park about displays and other types of joint opportunities.

Those attending the Gallup meeting indicated that consultation with the tribes needs to continue on a variety of levels; from the formal government-to-government consultation, to informal conversations on a more personal level. The concept of living culture should be included in the programs offered to visitors. Interpretational needs for different audiences should address the range of services, including activities such as demonstrations and tours. Some suggested that it is important for more American Indians to visit the park.





## Summary of Responses to the September Newsletter

In response to the scoping brochures distributed in September 2003, the park received 14 responses. Most responses were mailed; however, people also hand-delivered and e-mailed their comments to the park.

A wealth of comments regarding interpretation was shared with the park. Based on the comments, people are looking for more ways to understand the ancestral Puebloans from the past through today. A 3-dimensional model of the park was suggested to give visitors a better visual perspective of the site. It was suggested to provide descriptive maps, to include an area map and a map of any future excavation areas. People also suggested audio and guided tours as regular options at the park. Installing wayside signs at various points of interest in the park was seen as a good way to provide people information, while not being intrusive.

Several comments focused on new trail development. There was excitement about the chance for things

like a native plant path and natural education trails that could include the riparian area along the Animas River. An interpretive trail up to the mesa would be desirable.

Connecting the park to the surrounding community was addressed in numerous comments. One recommended that an educational specialist be hired by the park to assist in the coordinating of educational programs made available by the park for area schools. Others suggested that the park host special events during times such as the solstices and equinoxes, to encourage more people to visit. Inviting tribes to the park to demonstrate things like dancing also was suggested.

One commenter also raised concerns regarding the stewardship of the new lands acquired by the park. Lack of regular orchard irrigation, spread of noxious weeds, and the occurrence of trash in the Farmers Ditch were the primary concerns.

## Summary of Visitor Survey

In March 2003, Aztec Ruins National Monument contracted with Associate Professor Marty Lee, and Research Assistant Kameron Fuller from Northern Arizona University, to begin a year-long effort to gather information on visitors for use in the park's general management plan. This visitor survey information will be used in the development of alternatives for management, including programs in interpretation, visitor services, facility development, and resource management.

From March 2003 through August 2003, park staff distributed 580 questionnaires, with 570 returned, for a 98% response rate. So far, comments have been divided into the basic categories of Visitor Characteristics

and Experience, and Visitor Opinions about Park Management.

Highlights from Visitor Characteristics and Experience comments indicate that for over 70% of survey respondents, their stop at Aztec Ruins was one of many stops they were making as part of a larger travel plan, that often include stops to Mesa Verde National Park, Aztec Museum, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, or Salmon Ruins. Nearly 89% of visitors arrive by some type of automobile, whether a car, SUV, van, or truck. Other visitors arrive via recreational vehicle, motorcycles or by walking. The



night before coming to Aztec Ruins, 8% of visitors stay in Aztec and another 62% of visitors stay within 40 miles of the park.

The park attracts visitors from the surrounding regions, across the country and internationally. Thirteen percent of visitors were from New Mexico, followed by visitors from California, Texas, and Colorado. Approximately 52% of visitors came from other states throughout the United States. Four percent of the people who took the survey were from foreign countries.

Approximately 59% of visitors are between 17-61 years of age, followed by 25% who are seniors (62+ years), 14% who are youth (6-16 years old), and 2% who are children (5 years and younger). Of those visitors surveyed, 66% stayed approximately 1 to 2 hours and 85% were first-time visitors to the park. Most often, visitors said that their reasons for visiting were to see the archeological ruins, to learn and see how people lived back then, to satisfy curiosity, or to gain a perspective on the present through understanding the past.

Some of the most popular activities participated in by visitors while at the park included walking on the West Ruin trail, looking at the visitor center exhibits, watching the movie, and browsing the bookstore. When asked what they most enjoyed about their visit, many spoke about gaining an education and personal and spiritual enlightenment (20%); some mentioned the architecture (16%); and others specifically mentioned the reconstructed Great Kiva. Things that added to the visitor experience included benches along the trails (60%); numbered markers and warning signs (67%); and restrooms (65%). Less than half of the visitors surveyed responded to a question about what they enjoyed least about the park. Of those responding, 34% had comments about environmental factors such as cold, heat, and bugs.



Most visitors indicated that crowding was not a concern. Approximately 59% said they felt “not at all crowded” during their visit. When asked if there were places in the park where they felt crowded, 94% said no. Among the 6% responding “yes,” places listed included the rooms in the West Ruin and the Great Kiva.

Among the 22% of visitors traveling with children, 63% of the children did not participate in the Junior Ranger Program and 73% did not use the children’s trail guide. However, visitors to the park appear to have a fair amount of knowledge about the native people who built the ruins, and their knowledge increases as a result of their visit.

Forty-six percent of visitors indicated that they had either a fairly good or extensive knowledge of the site before arriving at the park. Fifty-one percent said they had either a somewhat or very limited knowledge prior to their visit.

Visitor opinions about park management covered a variety of topics. When given a list of park features and asked to identify “very significant” resources, items such as the original wood in prehistoric buildings (83%); educational value (77%); extensive community of prehistoric structures (76%); well preserved artifacts (75%); the Great Kiva reconstruction (74%); and the connection to living descendants of the ancient inhabitants (61%) were among those listed most often.

Visitors also responded to questions regarding backfilling and stabilization as methods to preserve archeological sites. Eighty-four percent of visitors did not notice backfilling activities going on during their visit. Among the 16% that said they noticed, 59% said backfilling had no effect on their experience, 30% said that it added to the experience, and 11% said it detracted. Similar questions were asked regarding stabilization. Sixty-three percent did not notice the stabilization. Among the 37% that did notice, 59% said it had no effect on their experience, 35% said it added to their experience, and 6% said it detracted from their experience.

When asked what type of interpretive / educational opportunities they would like to see at Aztec Ruins, those surveyed indicated interest in the following: self-guided walks (61%); interpretive and educational talks (55%); and museum exhibits and artifacts (54%). Interest in additional opportunities included: self-guided interpretive trails to unexcavated ruins (59%); chances to view more of the prehistoric community (59%); guided tours to unexcavated ruins (53%); and 48% indicated an interest in seeing more of the natural surroundings, including the river, birds, and other wildlife.

## Foundation Statements

In July 2003, the park staff and the planning team worked together to examine the existing park Foundation Statements and to consider what, if any, changes should be made to strengthen them for the GMP.

Also getting underway this summer was a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan (CIP) effort. The CIP serves as the basis for virtually all programmatic decisions regarding interpretation in the park. The CIP team and over 20

stakeholders met in August 2003 to discuss the draft Foundation Statements from the July workshop and to generate ideas about the most definitive stories of Aztec Ruins National Monument. The second CIP workshop in November was attended by members of the park staff involved in the development of future interpretive programs and focused on long-range and annual planning needs, and personal and non-personal services.

## Enabling Legislation

Generally, park units are created or established based on legislation passed by United States Congress. This enabling legislation usually outlines the purpose and significance of the new unit. Aztec Ruins was established by presidential proclamation on January 24, 1923 when President Warren G. Harding signed the following:

*“Whereas, there is near the town of Aztec, New Mexico, a ruin of great antiquity and historical interest; and, Whereas, the ground on which said ruin stands has been donated to the United States for the establishment of a national monument with a view to the preservation of said ruin for the enlightenment and culture of the nation; (I) do proclaim that there is hereby reserved and set apart as a national monument to be known as the Aztec Ruins National Monument...”*

## Park Purpose

Each park unit in the national park system is established for a specific purpose. The reason or reasons why Aztec Ruins National Monument was set aside is called its *park purpose*. The *park purpose* reflects current scientific or scholarly inquiry and interpretation. Purpose statements are based on legislation, legislative history, and historic trends. Other legislation that affects each park unit includes the 1916 National Park Service Organic Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Historic Preservation Act, and the Endangered Species Act. In considering any management action, the park must also consider special park mandates, NPS policies, and federal laws.

*Aztec Ruins National Monument’s purpose is to:*

- *Preserve, protect, and interpret the ancient Pueblo structures.*
- *Promote the protection, preservation, and stewardship of the cultural and natural resources of Aztec Ruins National Monument.*
- *Assist people in making personal connections to the multi-faceted stories related to Aztec Ruins National Monument.*
- *Foster awareness of the dynamic and diverse cultural values held by American Indians connected to Aztec Ruins.*

- *Promote the understanding and appreciation of Aztec Ruins within the cultural and historic context of the four corners region through means such as onsite interpretation, educational partnerships, research opportunities, and outreach.*
- *Achieve stated purpose through communication, consultation, and cooperation with groups and individuals.*





## Park Significance



To reflect the importance of Aztec Ruins National Monument to our nation's cultural and natural heritage, the park has developed significance statements. These statements describe the elements that distinguish Aztec Ruins as one of the units of the national park system, and reflect the exceptional values and resources that must be preserved and maintained to achieve the purpose of the park. These statements helped to identify primary park interpretive themes and desirable visitor experiences, and will help park managers establish management priorities.

*The community that took shape here from the late 1000s to 1280 A.D. contains a unique complex of architectural features that includes rare tri-walled structures, multi-story great houses, road alignments, earthworks, and ceremonial buildings that together contribute to a highly modified, ritual landscape exhibiting symmetry and careful planning.*

*Because of the nature and extent of the resources here, Aztec Ruins National Monument provides outstanding opportunities for continued archeological research and discovery. Aztec Ruins contains some of the most remarkably well-preserved and visible indigenous architecture in the Southwest. The designed landscape and many of the individual structures are monumental in scale. Masonry, wood elements, earthwork features, and artifacts are unusually well-preserved. Aztec Ruins is the best tree-ring-dated site in the Southwest.*

*Aztec Ruins is a prominent expression of a much longer human history in the larger Four Corners region. The site played a significant role in the widespread Chacoan system, and offers insights into that system's nature, extent, and chronology. Its physical integrity and ability to contribute to understanding that system were recognized in 1987 when Aztec Ruins National Monument was included in the designation of Chaco Culture National Historical Park as a World Heritage Site.*

*Aztec Ruins is sacred for many American Indians who maintain strong spiritual connections to the site.*

*The pioneering excavations of the American Museum of Natural History provided archeological data and explanations that influenced interpretations of cultural history in the San Juan Basin for half a century, and the profession as a whole. The reconstruction of the Great Kiva was an unparalleled effort in the history of southwestern archeology, and offers visitors an exceptional opportunity to connect with the people who built this ceremonial structure.*





## Park Fundamental Resources and Values

Certain resources and values warrant primary consideration during planning and management, because they are fundamental to maintaining the park's significance, or are otherwise culturally or ecologically significant. These can include systems, processes, features, visitor experiences, stories, scenes, or other resources and values.



*Fundamental resources and values at Aztec Ruins include:*

### **Fundamental Resources**

*The fundamental resources of Aztec Ruins include the following ancestral Pueblo features:*

- *main ruin group, including East and West Ruins*
- *additional outlying archeological sites*
- *cultural landscape*
- *original intact masonry*
- *ancient roadways*
- *artifacts*
- *earthworks*
- *original wooden roofs*

*Natural processes and human modifications that are important considerations in the planning, management and maintenance of park resources include but are not limited to:*

- *degradation and deterioration of historic properties*
- *surface and subsurface hydrology*
- *archeological and cultural landscape*
- *relatively unspoiled viewshed*
- *flora and fauna*
- *fire*

*The cultural resources within the boundaries of Aztec Ruins are only a small part of a much larger four corners regional system that includes many Chacoan communities.*

### **Fundamental Values**

- *The ancient structures and landscape features preserved at the park offer opportunities for visitors to learn about, appreciate, and make personal connections to an ancestral Pueblo community.*
- *There is an opportunity to experience a sense of solitude and/or spiritual connection when exploring the site.*
- *There is an opportunity to understand the continuum from ancient Pueblo communities, to historic agricultural use, to current management by the NPS.*
- *Many American Indians maintain strong connections to the area. Through cooperation, there is opportunity for NPS and American Indians to share information regarding interpretation, management, and conservation of resources.*
- *Through cooperation, there is potential to share American Indian oral histories and traditions at Aztec Ruins.*
- *Research of archeological resources has the potential to contribute knowledge to the past, present, and future.*
- *There are continuing opportunities to explore new methods and techniques for research and preservation of irreplaceable archeological resources.*

## Park Interpretive Themes

The stories told at parks like Aztec Ruins come from interpretive themes. Staff interpreters use themes to connect tangible park resources to larger ideas, meanings, and values. Interpretive programs provide access to stories by offering services to the public so that they can develop their own emotional and intellectual connections with park resources.



Primary Interpretive Themes at Aztec Ruins are:

- A The monumental scale and accessibility of the remarkably well-preserved West Ruin and its associated artifacts foster contemplation of the rich culture of the ancestral Puebloan builders, and offer evocative and inspirational connections to the people themselves.
- B The world-class resources of Aztec Ruins provide an opportunity to explore the complexity, diversity, and longevity of the indigenous cultures of the Four Corners region, and their relationship to our overall understanding of human history.
- C The evolution and interaction of archeological and other scholarly and popular perspectives with indigenous perspectives of Aztec Ruins increase opportunities to understand and appreciate this special place.
- D The proximity of the Aztec Ruins landscape to the contemporary City of Aztec provides a rare opportunity to compare and contrast how different people interact with their environment.

## Park Mission

Park mission statements are overarching concepts that speak to the vision or “big picture.”

The park mission for Aztec Ruins is:

*Aztec Ruins National Monument is the keeper of a remarkable community of ruins along the Animas River in northwest New Mexico. These ancient structures of the early Pueblo people are preserved and protected to tell their stories, so that the people of today and future generations can understand and appreciate that multi-faceted culture. We work toward that goal in cooperation with park neighbors, partners, tribes, and others, moving forward together to shape our future.*



## Park Mission Goals

Park mission goals are more specific statements that help determine operational requirements based on what the park or visitor experience should be like.

*Park mission goals for Aztec Ruins are:*

### ***Preserve Park Resources***

*Natural and cultural resources, and associated values at Aztec Ruins National Monument are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within the broader ecosystem and cultural context of northwest New Mexico.*

*The National Park Service at Aztec Ruins contributes to knowledge about archeology and other cultural resources and associated values; management decisions about resources and visitors are based on adequate scholarly and scientific information.*

### ***Provide for the Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Parks***

*Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of facilities, services, and educational opportunities at Aztec Ruins National Monument.*

*Park visitors and the general public understand and appreciate the purpose, significance, and preservation of Aztec Ruins National Monument and its resources for this and future generations.*

### ***Ensure Organizational Effectiveness***

*Aztec Ruins National Monument uses current management practices, systems, and technologies to accomplish its mission.*

*The National Park Service at Aztec Ruins National Monument increases its managerial capabilities through partnerships that promote appreciation and protection of a shared land heritage.*





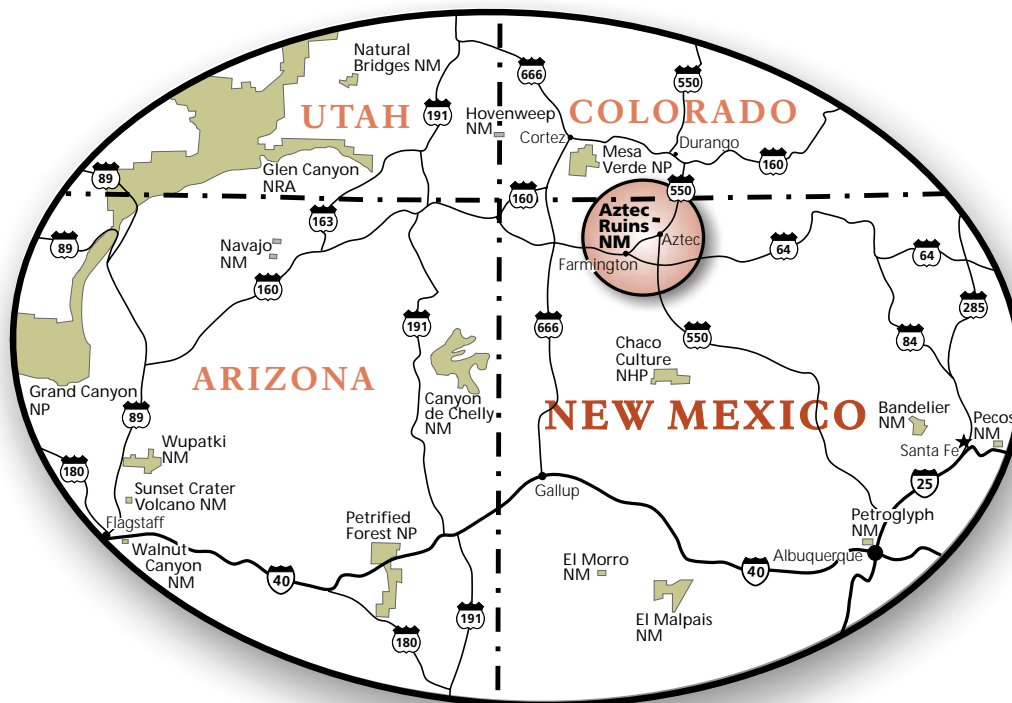


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Dennis L. Carruth  
Aztec Ruins National Monument  
#84 County Road 2900  
Aztec, NM 87410-9715

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## Response Form for General Management Planning News – Issue 2 – January 2004

Please use this form to share your ideas about Aztec Ruins National Monument. During this phase of the planning project, we would especially like to know what thoughts you might have about the following questions.

- *What is your opinion about the Foundation Statements?*
- *What aspects of current conditions could be changed to make your experience at the park better?*
- *What special park experiences need to be preserved for future generations?*
- *What facilities are needed to provide for park operations; visitor use and appreciation, and understanding of the ancient culture of the site; interpretation; natural and cultural resource management; and partnerships?*
- *What is your vision of the park? In other words, what would you like Aztec Ruins to be 20 years from now?*
- *What partnerships are necessary to accomplish our goals?*

Please try and return this form within two weeks of when you receive it. Your comments will be considered by the planning team as we move toward developing alternatives for management. And we hope you will remain involved with planning for the future of Aztec Ruins National Monument.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signed)

(Printed)

- ☐ I would like to be placed on the mailing list for the general management planning project.
- ☐ I would like to be taken off of the mailing list.
- ☐ The address you have is incorrect. Please change it to the following.

Name:

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**For additional information, please contact:**

Dennis L. Carruth  
Aztec Ruins National Monument  
#84 County Road 2900  
Aztec, NM 87410-9715

Tel: (505) 334-6174 ext. 22  
Fax: (505) 334-6372  
E-mail: [azru\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:azru_superintendent@nps.gov)



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**Dennis L. Carruth**  
**Aztec Ruins National Monument**  
**#84 County Road 2900**  
**Aztec, NM 87410-9715**

Space for additional comments

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